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## CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY

SCH 2009091126

### NOTICE OF PREPARATION

**FROM:** Mehdi Morshed  
Executive Director  
California High-Speed Rail Authority  
925 L Street, Suite 1425  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Preparation of a Project Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for a Fresno to Bakersfield High-Speed Train System

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority), as the Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for a proposed California High-Speed Train (HST) system, issued a Notice of Preparation on February 24, 2009 for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Merced to Bakersfield section of the Authority's proposed HST system in compliance with CEQA. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), as the federal lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, issued a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for this project. Those notices identified alternatives involving the HST System alignments and station locations between Merced and Bakersfield.

The Authority and FRA have determined that the environmental effects of the HST System from Merced to Bakersfield are more appropriately assessed in two separate EIR/EIS documents, one from Merced to Fresno and another for Fresno to Bakersfield. This Notice amends the environmental process started on February 24, 2009 to instead prepare a Project EIR/EIS for the Fresno to Bakersfield section of the HST System. The decision to complete two separate EIR/EISs was made because the project sections are of sufficient length, with logical termini, allowing for an analysis of environmental matters on a broad scope to ensure that the project will function properly without requiring additional improvements elsewhere, and the assessment of HST alternatives in the Fresno to Bakersfield section will not restrict consideration of alternatives for other transportation improvements.

This NOP initiates the State CEQA process and the preparation of an EIR/EIS for the Fresno to Bakersfield section of the proposed California High-Speed Train System. The Authority is issuing this NOP to solicit public and agency input into the scope of the EIR and to advise the public that outreach activities will be conducted by the Authority and its representatives in the preparation of the combined EIR/EIS. The FRA has responsibility for overseeing the safety of railroad operations, including the safety of any proposed high-speed ground transportation system. The FRA also has responsibility for providing Federal funding for intercity passenger rail capital investments, including high-speed rail, and may provide financial assistance for the project. The FRA will publish a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*, announcing the agency's intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this section of the HST project.

The Authority and the FRA completed a California High-Speed Train Program EIR/EIS (Statewide Program EIR/EIS) in August 2005 as the first-phase of a tiered environmental review process for the proposed California HST System. The Statewide Program EIR/EIS generally selected the Burlington Northern Santa

Fe Railroad (BNSF) corridor for the high-speed train route from Fresno to Bakersfield and the Union Pacific Railroad Company (UPRR) corridor was selected through the urban area of Fresno, with stations in downtown Fresno and Bakersfield. The Statewide Program EIR/EIS also stated that the project EIR/EIS for the HST in this portion of the Central Valley would evaluate an alignment around Hanford and a potential station location in the Visalia/Hanford/Tulare area.

The preparation of the Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will involve the development of preliminary engineering designs and the assessment of potential environmental effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the HST System, including track, ancillary facilities and stations, along the preferred alternative corridor from Fresno to Bakersfield with alternative alignments to the east of Hanford.

**DATES:** Written comments on the scope of the Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS should be provided to the Authority at the earliest possible date but not later than October 30, 2009. These comments will receive equal consideration to comments presented during the March 2009 scoping period for the Merced to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments on the scope should be sent to Ms. Carrie Bowen, Regional Director, ATTN: Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS, California High-Speed Rail Authority, 925 L Street, Suite 1425, Sacramento, CA 95814, or via email with subject line "Fresno to Bakersfield HST" to: [comments@hsr.ca.gov](mailto:comments@hsr.ca.gov). Comments may also be provided orally at the same address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Ms. Carrie Bowen at (559) 221-2636 or at the above noted address.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** The Authority was established in 1996 and is authorized and directed by statute to undertake the planning and development of a proposed statewide HST network that is fully coordinated with other public transportation services. The Authority adopted a Business Plan in June 2000, which reviewed the economic feasibility of an 800-mile-long HST system capable of speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour on a dedicated, fully grade-separated state-of-the-art track. The Authority released an updated Business Plan in November 2008.

In 2005, the Authority and FRA completed a Statewide Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System (Statewide Program EIR/EIS), as the first phase of a tiered environmental review process. The Authority certified the Statewide Program EIR under CEQA and approved the proposed HST System, and FRA issued a Record of Decision under NEPA for the Program EIS. This Statewide Program EIR/EIS established the purpose and need for the HST System, analyzed an HST System, and compared it with a No Project/No Action Alternative and a Modal Alternative. In approving the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the Authority and the FRA selected the HST Alternative, selected certain corridors/general alignments and general station locations for further study, incorporated mitigation strategies and design practices, and specified further measures to guide the development of the HST System during the site-specific project environmental review to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts.

The Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will tier from the Statewide Program EIR/EIS in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, (40 CFR § 1508.28) and State CEQA Guidelines (14 C.C.R. §15168[b]). Tiering will ensure that the Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS builds upon all previous work prepared for and incorporated in the Statewide Program EIR/EIS.

The Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will describe site-specific environmental impacts, will identify specific mitigation measures to address those impacts, and will incorporate design features to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. The FRA and the Authority will assess the site characteristics, size, nature, and timing of the proposed project elements to determine whether the impacts are potentially significant and whether impacts can be avoided or mitigated. This Project EIR/EIS

will identify and evaluate reasonable and feasible site-specific alternatives, and evaluate the impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance of the HST System. Information and documents regarding this HST environmental review process will be made available through the Authority's Internet site: <http://www.cahighspeedrail.gov/>.

**Project Objectives/Purpose and Need:** The purpose of the proposed HST System is to provide a new mode of high-speed intercity travel that would link major metropolitan areas of the state; interface with international airports, mass transit, and highways; and provide added capacity to meet increases in intercity travel demand in California in a manner sensitive to and protective of California's unique natural resources. The need for a HST System is directly related to the expected growth in population, and increases in intercity travel demand in California over the next twenty years and beyond. With the growth in travel demand, there will be an increase in travel delays arising from the growing congestion on California's highways and at airports. In addition, there will be negative effects on the economy, quality of life, and air quality in and around California's metropolitan areas from an increasingly congested transportation system that will become less reliable as travel demand increases. The intercity highway system, commercial airports, and conventional passenger rail serving the intercity travel market are currently operating at or near capacity, and will require large public investments for maintenance and expansion to meet existing demand and future growth. The proposed HST System is designed to address some of the social, economic, and environmental problems associated with transportation congestion in California.

**Alternatives:** The Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS will consider a No Project or No Action Alternative and a HST Alternative for the Fresno to Bakersfield section.

**No Project Alternative:** The No Project Alternative (No Action or No Build) represents the conditions in the corridor as it existed in 2009, and as it would exist based on programmed and funded improvements to the intercity transportation system and other reasonably foreseeable projects through 2035, taking into account the following sources of information: State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) for all modes of travel, airport plans, intercity passenger rail plans, and city and county plans.

**HST Alternative:** The Authority proposes to construct, operate and maintain an electric-powered steel-wheel-on-steel-rail HST System, about 800 miles long, capable of operating speeds of 220 mph on dedicated, fully grade-separated tracks, with state-of-the-art safety, signaling, and automated train control systems. The BNSF alignment from Fresno to Bakersfield was selected as the preferred alignment with the Statewide Program EIR/EIS. As defined in the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, this would utilize the UPRR corridor through the urban area of Fresno, and would require a new high-speed alignment around the city of Hanford. Alignment alternatives will also be evaluated to serve a potential station in the Visalia/Hanford/Tulare area. The HST would operate in this area at speeds up to 220 mph on tracks separate from the existing BNSF tracks. Engineering studies to be undertaken as part of this EIR/EIS process will examine and refine alignments in the BNSF corridor. The entire alignment would be grade separated from existing roadways. In addition, alternative sites for right-of-way maintenance, train storage facilities, and a light or heavy maintenance and repair facility will be evaluated in the Fresno to Bakersfield HST project area. See Figure A for a map of the Fresno to Bakersfield section of the HST system.

The two preferred station locations selected by the Authority and FRA through the Statewide Program EIR/EIS will be evaluated in the Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS. These stations are downtown Fresno and downtown Bakersfield. Alternative station sites at or near the selected station locations may be identified and evaluated. A potential station in the Visalia/Hanford/Tulare area will also be evaluated in this Project EIR/EIS.

**Probable Effects:** The purpose of the EIR/EIS process is to explore in a public setting the effects of the proposed project on the physical, human, and natural environment. The FRA and the Authority will continue the tiered evaluation of all significant environmental, social, and economic impacts of the construction and operation of the HST System. Impact areas to be addressed include transportation impacts; safety and security; land use and zoning; land acquisition, displacements, and relocations; agricultural land impacts; cultural resource impacts, including impacts on historical and archaeological resources and parklands/recreation areas; neighborhood compatibility and environmental justice; natural resource impacts including air quality, wetlands, water resources, noise, vibration, energy, and wildlife and ecosystems, including endangered species; and cumulative and secondary impacts. Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate all adverse impacts will be identified and evaluated.

**Comments:** Public scoping meetings were held in March 2009 for the Merced to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS and are an important component of the scoping process for the Fresno to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS for both the State and Federal environmental review. The Authority encourages broad participation in the EIR/EIS process and review of the resulting environmental documents. Comments are invited from all interested agencies and the public to insure the full range of issues related to the proposed project and all reasonable alternatives are addressed and all significant issues are identified. In particular, the Authority is interested in learning whether there are areas of environmental concern where there might be a potential for significant site-specific impacts from the Fresno to Bakersfield section of the HST System. Public agencies with jurisdiction are requested to advise the Authority and FRA of the applicable permit and environmental review requirements of each agency, and the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to the agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Public agencies are requested to send their responses to this Notice of Preparation to the Authority at the earliest possible date but not later than October 30, 2009.

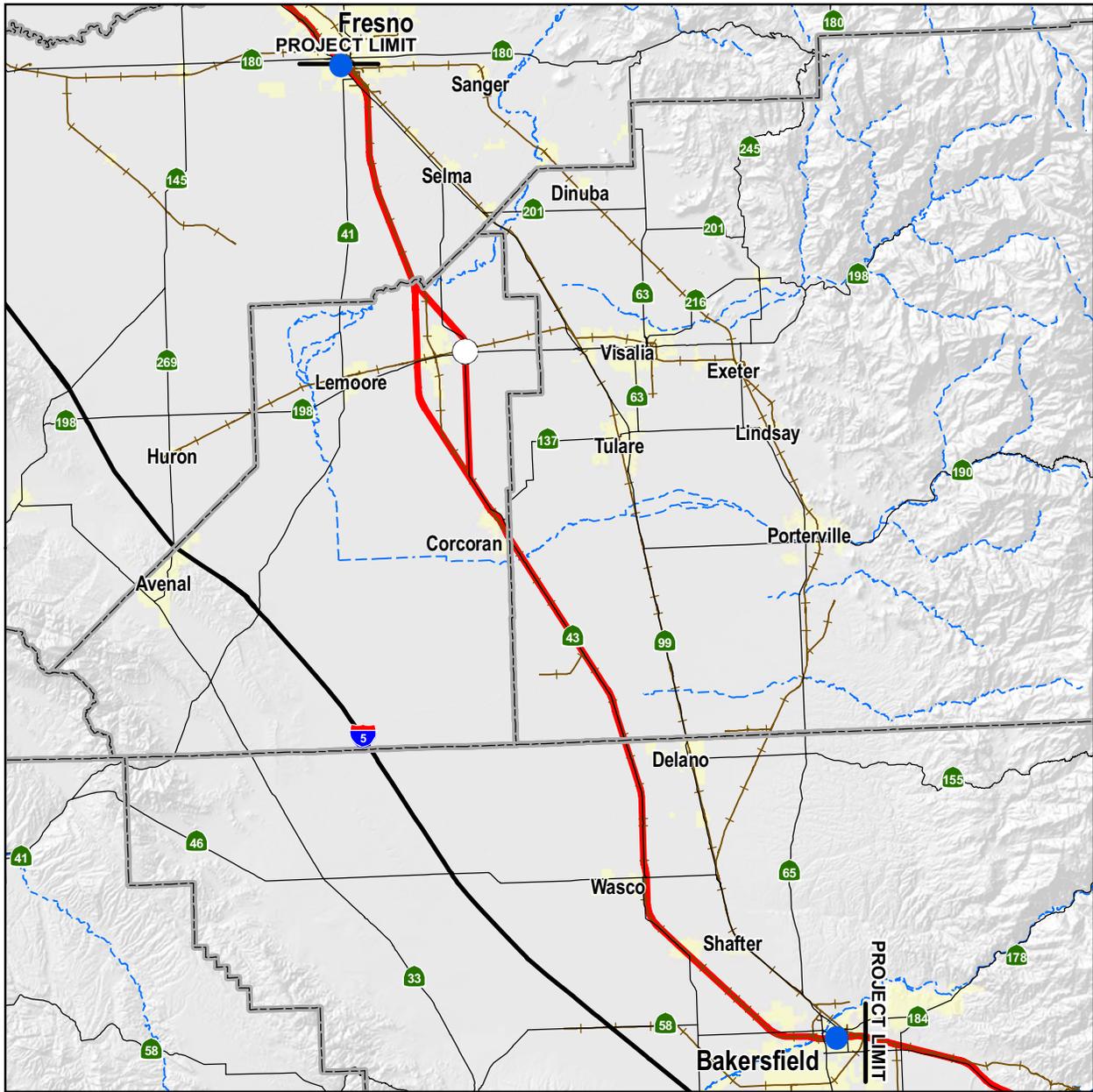
The Authority also invites the general public and all other interested parties to comment on the scope and content of the EIR/EIS. The Authority is soliciting additional oral and written comments, suggestions, requests for information, and requests for public meetings no later than October 30, 2009.

These comments will receive equal consideration as comments presented during the March 2009 scoping period for the former Merced to Bakersfield HST Project EIR/EIS.

Please send your response and direct any comments or questions regarding this Project to Ms. Carrie Bowen, Regional Director of the California High-Speed Rail Authority at the address shown above.

Date: 9/29/09

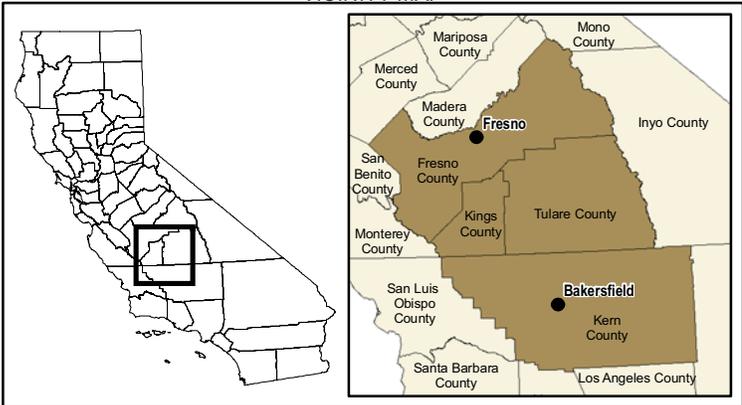
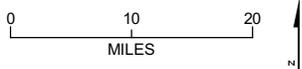
Signature:   
Carrie Bowen, Regional Director



VICINITY MAP

LEGEND

- Preferred HST station
- Potential Visalia/Hanford/Tulare Area HST Station
- HST Route Alternatives
- Highway
- +— Railroad
- - - - River
- City/Town limits
- ▭ County boundary



**FIGURE 1-2**  
**Fresno to Bakersfield HST**  
**Project Section**